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June 12, 2014

Business Student Recognized for Entrepreneur Work with Nutrition Program

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Ben Payne helps feed malnourished families several thousand miles from home. With the aid of his family and business principles he's learned as a marketing major, the Gardner-Webb University senior has assisted in the development of a sustainable nutrition program in one of Guatemala's many impoverished villages. It's work that's earned him recognition in the local community and a mission he hopes will be replicated in other countries around the world.

Payne hails from Pendleton, Ind., where his father, Bert, works as a veterinarian who specializes in poultry. Several years ago, a family friend connected the Paynes with Pensacola, Fla.-based Global Business Solutions Institute (GBSI). The information technology training company maintains a nonprofit branch that conducts missions in several countries, including Central America's San Pedro, La Laguna, a village in central Guatemala. Half of the country's children five years and younger don't get the nutrients they need to live healthily. That rate of chronic malnutrition is the fourth highest in the world.

A young girl in Guatemala.

In 2012, Payne visited Guatemala for the first time as GBSI delivered chickens and supplementary supplies to help feed the hungry. But the aid didn't end with a simple food dropoff, according to Payne. "What started as bringing relief to people in Guatemala by providing them with chickens evolved into us determining how we could replicate this aid and make it something that could empower the people of Guatemala to do this on their own," he shared. "The idea is sustainable relief, not temporary relief. It's very much the parable that you can give a man a fish and feed him for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, you can feed him for his life."

GBSI worked with Guatemalan vendors to purchase wood, concrete, fencing, roofing, nesting materials, feed and other supplies to create small chicken houses in San Pedro. Now, the residents maintain those houses to supply chickens and eggs in the village. "If a family uses a dozen eggs a week, one farm will produce between 14 and 15 dozen eggs daily, providing enough eggs to help as many as 100 families in a week," Payne shared.

Drawing on experience from his business school studies at Gardner-Webb, Payne has helped form a business plan to sustain the nutrition

A sustainable farm in Guatemala.

program in Guatemala. "I'm applying what I've learned at Gardner-Webb. We're accounting for revenue, cost and making enough money to sustain and grow this mission. Now I'm going beyond focusing on just coming to Gardner-Webb and getting a degree," he reflected. "I'm applying knowledge from the classroom to real life. It's an empowering feeling."

The nutrition project has changed lives in Guatemala, but it's also impacted Payne's life. He met his wife, Grace, in Guatemala while both were visiting the country for mission work. The two married in August 2013 and now live in Boiling Springs. "This project is about so much more than world relief now," Payne shared. "It's about relationships, too. It's not just a project my family's been a part of. It's a project that we are."

Payne's business plan for sustainable nutrition has also gained him recognition in the Cleveland County, N.C., community. His presentation about the project was honored in the University category at the 2014 Entrepreneur Expo at Cleveland Community College

A Guatemalan woman receives chickens for her small family farm.

(CCC). According to John Lattimore, dean of business and allied health at CCC, "Ben's project was noteworthy in its business-like approach and the end result he seeks to achieve. It is one of those projects that goes under the heading of social entrepreneurship by using an imaginative yet simple approach to make a poor part of the world better. He seems to have a sense of mission far beyond the normal college student."

Dr. Donald Caudill, GWU marketing professor and Payne's academic advisor, said he agrees with Lattimore's assessment of Payne's skills. "In my 33 years of teaching thousands of students at the university level, I can count on one hand the number of students as capable and service-oriented as Ben," Caudill shared. "Ben has the competency to prosper in the business world, yet he chooses to serve God by applying his business skills to serving others. He personifies the kind of leader that the Godbold School of Business at Gardner-Webb University strives to produce and he has been a joy to teach."

Plans call for growth of the chicken houses and their reach in Guatemala. The chickens, purchased in nearby Guatemala City, will be replaced with a new flock every two years, Payne said, and the older birds will be given to additional families that need eggs and meat. Project organizers hope to connect with sponsors who will invest in supporting the expansion of the outreach ministry to other parts of Guatemala and to other countries around the world. "We're seeing success, and God's bringing all these pieces together," Payne said. "Now, we're examining how we can replicate it and tailor it to other countries. We could take it overseas to Africa, provided local governments and leaders of villages cooperate."

Payne is set to complete his undergraduate degree at Gardner-Webb in December. While he also works at a church in upstate South Carolina and said he's felt a calling to youth ministry, he's open to the possibility of a career in international mission work through the nutrition or other programs. "God has opened doors for me to be a participant in this project, and God enabled me to have the skills to add to what (GBSI) is doing. I've always had a heart for missions. You just have to be willing to see what God's put before you."

Global Business Solutions Institute finds its purpose in sharing love and compassion to enhance the lives of the needy and alleviate poverty around the globe. For more information, visit gbsinstitute.com.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University provides exceptional educational opportunities within a Christian environment, preparing students to think critically, to succeed professionally, and to serve faithfully as members of their local and global communities.